



Dementia Friendly Restaurants

Restaurants, cafés and food service establishments help create enjoyable dining experiences for people living with dementia and their families. This Dementia Friendly America Sector Guide outlines practical actions that owners, managers and staff can take to provide supportive and accessible dining environments, with simple steps to strengthen communication, improve the environment and enhance customer service.

UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA

Dementia is a general term used to describe a group of symptoms that affect memory, thinking, communication and decision-making in ways that interfere with daily life. It is not a normal part of aging. Common symptoms include memory loss, confusion, trouble finding words, difficulty planning or solving problems and changes in mood or behavior. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia. Other types include Vascular Dementia, Lewy Body Dementia and Frontotemporal Dementia.

In dining settings, dementia may make menus, noise and payment processes harder to manage.

BUILD DEMENTIA AWARENESS

Provide dementia-awareness training for all staff, including hosts, servers, managers and kitchen staff through programs such as Dementia Friends or invite local experts to lead educational sessions or workshops.

Include dementia awareness in staff orientation and regular meetings. Remind staff that small gestures—patience, eye contact and reassurance—make a big difference.

Support employees who are providing care to someone with dementia by offering flexible scheduling, access to employee assistance programs or referrals to resources like the Eldercare Locator and the Alzheimer's Association Helpline.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND RESPECTFULLY

Engage the guest before speaking. Make eye contact, smile and face the person directly so they feel acknowledged and included. If you know their name, use it; if not, a warm greeting like “Good afternoon” helps establish connection.

Speak slowly and clearly. Use short, simple sentences with one idea at a time to make conversation easier to follow.

Use a warm, friendly tone and body language. Smile, make eye contact and speak calmly to help guests feel welcome, respected and at ease.

Ask one question at a time. Offer simple choices—like yes/no or “Would you like to sit here or near the window?”—to make decisions easier.

Give extra time to respond. Pause and wait patiently; rushing or finishing sentences can cause frustration or embarrassment.

Repeat or rephrase if needed. If something isn't understood, say it another way using simple words or shorter phrases.

Prepare staff for common situations. Train employees to handle repeated questions, forgotten payments or wandering and have a simple plan for reuniting guests with companions or calling for help if needed.

Personalize your approach. Notice small preferences—like a favorite seat, drink or time of day to dine—to help guests feel known and valued.

IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Provide large-print, high-contrast signs. Use simple words and familiar icons (e.g., entrances, seating and restrooms) placed at eye level to guide guests.

Keep floors safe and dry. Avoid shiny or patterned floors that can cause glare or confusion and mark stairs or ramps with bright, high-contrast tape or paint.

Keep lighting bright and even in all areas, especially hallways and restrooms. Reduce glare and shadows to help people see clearly and feel safe moving around.

Provide comfortable, stable seating that is easy to get in and out of. Place sturdy chairs with armrests in dining and waiting areas.

Make restrooms easy to find and safe to use. Post clear signs and maintain bright, even lighting. Install grab bars and offer single-use or family restrooms when possible.

Reduce distractions. Lower music and television volume and seat guests in quiet areas away from loud noise or heavy foot traffic to make it easier to hear and focus.

Use high-contrast table settings. Choose solid-colored plates, cups and tablecloths that stand out from the table surface to help guests see food clearly.

Make staff easy to recognize. Provide uniforms or large name badges so guests know who to approach for help.

Ensure accessible parking and entryways. Designate clearly marked parking spaces near the entrance and keep pathways and doors well lit; use automatic or easy-to-open doors when possible.

CREATE A SUPPORTIVE DINING EXPERIENCE

Respect dignity. Treat all guests as adults and offer discreet assistance when needed.

Simplify menus. Use large, easy-to-read fonts, plain backgrounds and clear categories.

Offer familiar routines and flexible service. Keep popular menu items available, describe them consistently and allow extra time for ordering or payment.

Encourage small acts of care. Notice when a guest may need help—such as walking them to their table or re-explaining the menu—and offer calm, friendly assistance.

Keep staff assignments consistent. When possible, schedule the same servers or hosts for returning guests.

ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

Host dementia-friendly dining events. Offer “quiet dining hours” or “memory cafes” in partnership with local aging or dementia organizations.

Recognize and support care partners. Offer small gestures like a “care partner appreciation discount,” coffee mornings or reserved tables for support groups.

Support community education. Offer your dining space during off-hours for dementia-awareness talks or Dementia Friends sessions.

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Become a Dementia Friend
dfamerica.org/become-a-dementia-friend/

Alzheimer's Association Helpline
800-272-3900 | www.alz.org



Find or Start a Memory Cafe
dfamerica.org/

Eldercare Locator
800-677-1116 | eldercare.acl.gov



Scan or visit
dfamerica.org/resource-listing



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